

Tennessee Pollution Prevention Partnership Success Story



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The Outdoor Classroom

The Member

St. Ann School (PreK-8th Grade) has 587 students, 42 teachers and 16 staff members. It is located in Bartlett, TN in Shelby County. St. Ann students and teachers designed, constructed and continue to maintain an outdoor classroom that has been certified by the National Wildlife Federation as a Backyard Habitat.

The Story

In 1996 several teachers went to an Outdoor Classroom Workshop in Nashville, TN. After writing a comprehensive plan, permission to build was secured. With the help of a Master Gardener student from the Agriculture Center of Memphis, consultants from various state parks and organizations, the first meeting took place with faculty. The Master Gardener listened intently and developed a blueprint of their ideas and what would soon become the St. Ann School Outdoor Classroom.

The “Big Dig” was held, and parents, students, faculty and staff volunteered to help in the construction. Dirt and mulch were brought in, and plants were planted. Our dream had become a reality!! Two times a year, once in the fall and once in the spring, family work days were held to do maintenance on the various beds.

The Outdoor Classroom included: Vegetable Garden, Herb Garden, Pizza Garden, Religion Garden, Butterfly Garden, Grape Vine Arbor, Pond, Animal Tracking Station, International Garden, Southwest Desert Garden, Iris and Azalea Garden, Amphitheatre, and Storage Shed.

The Success

“If you build it, they will come.” was the groundbreaking theme. The motto held true, and people from all over the community came with tools and gloves and the mind to work! That fall it was thrilling to see the teachers planting with their classes. Several outdoor performances were also held on the stage. Over the next few years, new activities evolved: A birdhouse building contest was held and entries hung in the Outdoor Classroom; an Environmental Fare was held in the

spring with local and state agencies providing materials and activities; our first Energy Carnival was held with representatives from Memphis Light Gas & Water and other agencies.

Other additions have been: A bed in the shape of Tennessee with state symbols; a working river system was constructed by the SPARKS class; several members of our community have been honored by having memorials placed in the garden. A nationally known Holocaust rescuer, **Miriam Pritchard**, visited the Middle School for the dedication of a tree in her honor in conjunction with their Holocaust Unit. The St. Ann Outdoor Classroom has involved the entire St. Ann community. Each year 500-600 students use the Outdoor Classroom, plus scouts, church youth groups, and other community groups. Faculty members were trained in Projects Wet, Wild, Learning Tree, and Ag in the Classroom as well as in nature photography.

On Sept. 26, 2008, “*Whooo Comes Out At Night?*” was held in the Outdoor Classroom and on our field. Student groups rotated to 5 different activities, learning “Survival Skills”; “Plants and Animals of the Night” from the Memphis Botanic Gardens and the Memphis Garden Club; they gazed through telescopes and learned about the stars from members of the Memphis Astrological Society; they also participated in a Night Hike/Scavenger Hunt, stories of the night, and the Underground Railroad.

The Pollution Prevented

The garden is a 1,375 square-foot space that is pesticide-free, uses organic gardening methods, provides wildlife habitat, and prevents soil and runoff water pollution. Only non-invasive and native plants are used to prevent intrusion by exotic species. The construction of a **dry creek bed** stopped the erosion and run-off water to neighboring properties. Railroad ties surround each of the beds, controlling soil erosion. Importantly, our students are spending time outdoors and learning about natural systems.

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